



State of Connecticut

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STATE CAPITOL
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PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE

Senator DeFronzo, Representative Guerrera, and Members of the Transportation Committee,

I am testifying in strong opposition to HB 5474 An Act Concerning The Establishment of Electronic Tolls at the State's Borders.

Placing tolls at the State Borders would unfairly burden residents and businesses from border towns and cities, including Danbury. Many of my constituents travel into New York to work and come back to Danbury where they live. A toll at the border would essentially be an unfair "commuter tax" on these residents who already pay their fair share of taxes to the State of Connecticut.

Tolls present safety and environmental issues that Danbury and other border towns would bear the brunt of. Cash lanes, which are inevitable, will cause back-up and congestion on I-84. I travel this road every day. I can assure you it is already congested. We all know toll congestion has been a factor in many horrific accidents nationwide, most notably in this state, the Stratford accident. We cannot afford to have another tragedy like this one in our state.

Tolls at the border will cause trucks and cars to exit the highway and drive through Danbury's residential neighborhoods to avoid the toll. This well-known side effect is extremely detrimental to the quality of life and safety of these residents. Moreover, there are too many alternative routes that will allow for this conduct and which make enforcement against it impractical. Currently, when I-84 is backed up, people already get off the highway and drive down Route 6/Mill Plain Road in Danbury. Congestion on this road is unbearable already. I cannot imagine what this scene would look like if tolls were implemented in this area. It would give a new meaning to "gridlock".

As a leading sales tax revenue generator, Danbury is an economic engine for the state. A significant portion of our retail sales come from New York residents that find it

convenient to cross the border to Danbury. Placing tolls on the border will be a clear disincentive to these shoppers and will cause a loss of sales tax revenue for the state; the only question is how much. This side-effect will hurt our local businesses, hurt the state, and be generally counter-productive to the goal of raising state revenue. This dilemma also illustrates why a more effective toll strategy would be to implement tolls in the interior of the state and on our state bridges rather than on the borders.

Although tolls may generate revenue for the State of Connecticut, the potential loss of Federal funding could be even greater. Without tolls, federal funding may be used on things such as improvements to highways, which Connecticut desperately needs. Also, in the last year of their operation, Connecticut tolls cost approximately \$20 million dollars to run and operate. This did not include the \$6-7 million dollars that went to paying fringe benefits, vacation and sick leave, and longevity and bonuses for the toll workers. These known costs taken together with the unknown extent of revenue losses we will suffer makes border tolls a financial gamble not worth taking for the state.

In conclusion, I ask that you please vote against this bill. There are clearly better and fairer ways for the state to raise revenue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Joe".

Joe Taborsak

State Representative for the 109th Assembly District